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FOLK-TALES OF ANGOLA.

As the first volume of the Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society is now ready, it appears due to members, who may not think it necessary to procure the work, to give some account of the scope and contents of a publication which their assistance has rendered possible.

The collector and editor of these tales is not one of the adventurers who, for the sake of curiosity, love of excitement, or personal ambition, has headed or accompanied a military expedition; in his volume we do not have the crude acquisitions of a visitor ignorant of the language, conceptions, and necessities of the people, on whom he is accustomed to look as a superior being, *de haut en bas*.

Mr. Chatelain represents that honorable type of laborers who, without selfish objects of any sort, sacrifice youth, health, and pains to the extension of civilization and morality among a simple race of men with whom they live as friends and companions.

To citizens of the United States, the admission to civic rights of descendants of African barbarians — a step without parallel — makes ethnological problems matters of the most practical concern. It is true that in this social development, as in all others, matters must work themselves out and experience is secondary, *solvitur ambulando*; nevertheless light from whatever source, on the essential mental and moral qualities of Africans, is most welcome. Mr. Chatelain justly remarks: —

Never have more momentous questions come before the bar of public opinion than these between European civilization — including the rum and cannon power — and the inoffensive native races, nations, tribes, and citizens of Africa. Yet the great court has hitherto heard the voices of only one side; yea, the principal, the offended side, has not even been notified of the proceedings, much less invited to testify on its own behalf and advocate its own vital interests.

In Africa, where there are no facilities for intimacy with the natives, and where there is no written literature, the only way to get at the character, the moral and intellectual make-up, of the races and tribes, is to make a thorough study of their social and religious institutions, and of their unwritten, oral literature, that is, of their folk-lore.

It has of late been not uncommon to disparage the ethnological value of folk-tales, to regard tribal traditions as of small consequence, to maintain that in observation of custom alone instruction is to be sought, — a tendency expressed in the adage, "Attend to what they do, not to what they say." Without denying that in certain respects this highly unscientific formula may be suggestive, it is nevertheless

in the main false and misleading. With far more intelligent comprehension of the true relation of language to action, our author observes :—

Books of African travellers have been prominent before the public for the last two decades, but, as a rule, only such accessory parts of folk-lore as strike the sense of sight—native dress, arms, and strange customs—have been described, and seldom accurately at that. The essential constituents of folk-lore, those embodied in words, have been ignored, and the moral and intellectual world of Africa is to-day as much a *terra incognita* as geographical Africa was fifty years ago.

It is to Mr. Chatelain himself that the writing of Ki-mbundu is due; and the present collection, being provided with original text, literal translation (one tale in transliterated form), and linguistic notes, possesses a considerable philological value, forming indeed the first reader printed in the language. The English version is executed with equal simplicity and skill, giving to the English reader the impression of the African mind.

The editor remarks that native classification divides the tales into *mi-soso*, or fictions, and *maka*, or anecdotes. How far this division represents a really essential or ancient distinction we should entertain doubts; in any case, it is interesting to observe to what degree of abstraction the Angolan native has attained. The fictions include several classes of tales,—*märchen*, animal tales, and hero tales. The *märchen*, especially, obviously contain European elements, as is the case with all simple races which have been even for a short time in contact with Europeans; but in these cases the imported element, even though sometimes the groundwork, forms only a skeleton; the story, undergoing reconstruction, becomes as illustrative of native character and conditions as if it were in reality of native origin. Other stories, however, make the impression of being purely African.

An interesting example of the latter class, closely bordering on mythology :—

The hero, disdaining to mate with women of the earth, aspires to the daughter of Lord Sun and Lady Moon, but can find no way of conveying a letter to heaven, the various animals consulted being unequal to the task. In this dilemma, Mainu the Frog offers his services, and, though received with ridicule, sets seriously about the undertaking. The people of the Sun are in the habit of descending to the earth to draw water at a certain well, using a cobweb as a ladder. The Frog, knowing this usage, plunges into the well, and, when the bearers arrive, gets into a water-jar, and is carried to heaven, where, without showing himself, he contrives to lay before Lord

Sun the letter asking for the hand of his daughter. The Sun is puzzled as to the personality of the suitor; but the Frog, who has got back to earth by the medium of the water-jars; repeats his journeys, and eventually steals the eyes of the girl. A diviner, being consulted, declares that the only salvation for the sufferer is to marry the suitor who has laid on her the spell. The Spider weaves a particularly thick cobweb, by which the daughter of the Sun is taken to earth and delivered to her lover.

The animal tales, full of spirit, wit, and energy, celebrate as usual the victory of skill over strength. With regard to stories of this class, the writer remarks that the animal world, as well as the spirit world, is organized and governed just like that of men. In Angola the elephant is king of beasts; the lion, head of the beasts of prey, being his principal vassal. Every chief or king, like an African petty ruler, has his court and parliament, and this principle extends down to the ants.

At the general assembly of the whole animal creation, in its proceedings and in the execution of its resolutions, every animal exercises the office for which it is qualified. Thus, in the fables, the elephant is equally supreme in strength and wisdom; the lion is strong, but not morally noble, as in European lore, nor wise as the elephant. The hyena is the type of brutal force united with stupidity; the leopard, that of vicious power combined with inferior wits. The fox or jackal is famous for astuteness; the monkey, for shrewdness and nimbleness; the hare or rabbit, for prudence and agility; the turtle or terrapin, for unsuspected ability. The partridge, on the contrary, is silly and vain. The *mbambi* antelope is swift, harmless, unsuspecting; the *ngulungu* antelope (*tragelaphus gratus* or *scriptus*) is foolish and ill-fated. The turtle-dove is, as with us, symbolic of purity, chastity, and wisdom; but the dog, on the contrary, personifies all that is mean, servile, and despicable.

We must be allowed to reprint the tale of the "Elephant and Frog" (No. XXXVIII.), which will be recognized as a variant of a well-known story of Uncle Remus:—

I often tell of Mr. Elephant and Mr. Frog, who were courting at one house.

One day Mr. Frog spake to the sweetheart of Mr. Elephant, saying: "Mr. Elephant (is) my horse." Mr. Elephant, when he came at night, then the girls tell him, saying: "Thou art the horse of Mr. Frog!"

Mr. Elephant then goes to Mr. Frog's, saying: "Didst thou tell my sweetheart that I am thy horse?" Mr. Frog says, saying: "No; I did not say so." They go together to find the sweetheart of Mr. Elephant.

On the way, Mr. Frog told Mr. Elephant, saying: "Grandfather, I have not strength to walk. Let me get up on thy back!" Mr. Elephant said: "Get up, my grandson." Mr. Frog then goes up.

When a while passed, he told Mr. Elephant : "Grandfather, I am going to fall. Let me seek small cords to bind thee in mouth." Mr. Elephant consents. Mr. Frog then does what he has asked.

When passed a little while, he told again Mr. Elephant, saying : "Let me seek a green twig to fan the mosquitoes off thee." Mr. Elephant says : "Go." He then fetches the twig.

They, when they were about to arrive, the girls saw them, and they went to meet them with shouting, saying : "Thou, Mr. Elephant, art the horse indeed of Mr. Frog!"

Applicable in America as well as in Africa is the narrative of the manner in which the previousness of the Squirrel interfered with his political aspirations :—

"Squirrel," the people said, "directly, we (will) give him the kingship." He said : "It shall be to-day." The people said : "We are looking for the insignia of the kingship." Squirrel said : "I, it shall be to-day, at once." The people said : "He, we only told him, saying, 'we are going to get the insignia,' he says 'it shall be to-day;' why, we will give it to him no more. If we gave him it, he could not govern the people."

Squirrel, they talked of giving him the kingship. He said : "It must be to-day." It remained among the people : "To-day at once deprived Squirrel of the kingship."

I have told the little story. Finished.

Not less interesting are the narratives supposed to be statements of fact. Several of these throw a welcome light on heretofore unexplained points of African religion.

In No. XLI. "The Young Man and the River," a youth, who, after the African fashion, has been given as a slave by his uncle, in order to redeem a debt, and is cruelly treated by his masters, is befriended by the River. He sees in a dream the River, which bids him be at the landing at dawn ; there he is to choose between the objects he shall see floating down the stream. As instructed, he passes by treasures apparently better worth collecting, and takes an inconspicuous medicine-basket. In dream, once more, he is instructed as to its use, and becomes a famous doctor.

In No. XL., "King Kitamba kia Xiba," we have one of those personal visits to the world of the dead common among races in a like stage of culture. Kitamba mourns so bitterly the loss of his head-wife that he forbids alike labor and pleasure :—

Mbanza Kitamba said : "Since my head-wife died, I shall mourn ; my village too, no man shall do anything therein. The young people shall not shout ; the women shall not pound ; no one shall speak in the village." The head-men said : "Master, the woman is dead ; thou sayest, 'In village they shall not speak ; I will not eat, not drink, not speak ;' we never

yet saw this." He, the king, said: "If you desire that I laugh, (that) I talk, (that) in the village they talk, it shall be (that) you bring me my head-wife, Queen Muhongo." The head-men say: "King, the person is now dead; how can we fetch her?" He said: "If ye cannot fetch her, I am in mourning; in my village no person shall talk."

Here he sees the lord of the dead, and near the latter a figure in chains. This is the sub-terrestrial (not in this case the astral) body of King Kitamba himself, whose mourning is thus explained by the fact that his soul is already in the under-world. But the story is too weird not to be cited:—

The head-queen said: "Very well. Come look at that one; who is it sitting?" The doctor said: "I know him not." The head-queen said: "He is Lord Kalunga-ngombe; he is always consuming us, us all." She said again: "He yonder, who (is he)? who is in the chain." The doctor said: "He looks like King Kitamba, whom I left where I came from." The queen said: "He is King Kitamba. He is in the world not any longer; there lacks how many years, the chief will die. Thou, doctor, who camest to fetch me, we, here in Kalunga, never comes one here to return again. Take my arm-ring, that they buried me with; that, when thou goest there, they accuse thee not of lying, saying, 'Thou wentest not there.' The chief himself, do not tell it him, saying, 'I found thee already in Kalunga.'" She paused. She said again: "Thou thyself, doctor, I cannot give thee to eat here. If thou eatest here, thou canst return no more." The doctor said: "Well." He departed.

An item in the notes of Mr. Chatelain furnishes material for reflection. No one would have thought of connecting Napoleon with Africa; yet the far reaching impulse which he gave to the civilized world extended even into the regions of barbarism. After his fall, a number of Italian soldiers belonging to his army were deported to Portugal, and thence came to Loanda, where they enlisted in the colonial Portuguese troops. After the expiration of their term of service, these engaged in private business, and married native women; hence a generation of mulattoes, in whom, as the writer remarks, the fire of the old Napoleonic soldiery is not quite extinct; and some of these still take pride in their indirect connection with Napoleonic history.

On the whole, The American Folk-Lore Society seems to be fortunate in beginning its Memoirs with a thoroughly original work, which contains much and suggests more. The problem of African religion and character is not yet solved, and will not be solved until the folk-lore of Africa is better known; and no one can read this book without desire to promote such collection.

*W. W. N.*